Numb. 114

The TATLER.

By *Iſaac Bickerſtaff* Eſq;

Ut in Vitâ, ſic in Studiis, pulcherrimum & humaniſſimum exiſtimo, Severitatem Comitatemque miſcere, ne illa in Triſtitiam, hæc in Petulantiam procedat. Plin. Epiſt.

From *Thurſday December* 29. to *Saturday December* 31. 1709.

Sheer-Lane, December 30.

I WAS walking about my Chamber this Morning in a very gay Humour, when I ſaw a Coach ſtop at my Door, and a Youth about Fifteen alighting out of it, whom I perceived to be the eldeſt Son of my Boſom-Friend that I gave ſome Account of in my Paper of the 17th of the laſt Month. I felt a ſenſible Pleaſure riſing in me at the Sight of him, my Acquaintance having begun with his Father when he was juſt ſuch a Stripling, and about that very Age. When he came up to me, he took me by the Hand, and burſt out in Tears. I was extremely moved, and immediately ſaid, Child, How does your Father do? He began to reply, My Mother---- But could not go on for weeping. I went down with him into the Coach, and gathered out of him, That his Mother was then dying, and that while the holy Man was doing the laſt Offices to her, he had taken that Time to come and call me to his Father, who (he ſaid) would certainly break his Heart if I did not go and comfort him. The Child's Diſcretion in coming to me of his own Head, and the Tenderneſs he ſhowed for his Parents, would have quite overpowered me, had not I reſolved to fortify my ſelf for the ſeaſonable Performances of thoſe Duties which I owed to my Friend. As we were going, I could not but reflect upon the Character of that excellent Woman, and the Greatneſs of his Grief for the Loſs of one who has ever been the Support to him under all other Afflictions. How (thought I) will he be able to bear the Hour of her Death, that could not, when I was lately with him, ſpeak of a Sickneſs, which was then paſt, without Sorrow. We were now got pretty far into *Weſtminſter*, and arrived at my Friend's Houſe. At the Door of it I met *Favonius*, not without a ſecret Satisfaction to find he had been there. I had formerly converſed with him at this Houſe; and as he abounds with that Sort of Virtue and Knowledge which makes Religion beautiful, and never leads the Converſation into the Violence and Rage of Party-Diſputes, I have liſtened to him with great Pleaſure. Our Diſcourſe chanc'd to be upon the Subject of Death, which he treated with ſuch a Strength of Reaſon, and Greatneſs of Soul, that inſtead of being terrible, it appeared to a Mind rightly cultivated, altogether to be contemned, or rather to be deſired. As I met him at the Door, I ſaw in his Face a certain Glowing of Grief and Humanity, heighten'd with an Air of Fortitude and Reſolution, which, as I afterwards found, had ſuch an irreſiſtible Force, as to ſuſpend the Pangs of the Dying, and the Lamentation of the neareſt Friends who attended her. I went up directly to the Room where ſhe lay, and was met at the Entrance by my Friend, who, notwithſtanding his Thoughts had been compoſed a little before, at the Sight of me turned away his Face and wept. The little Family of Children renewed the Expreſſions of their Sorrow according to their ſeveral Ages and Degrees of Underſtanding. The eldeſt Daughter was in Tears, buſied in Attendance upon her Mother; others were kneeling about the Bed-ſide: And what troubled me moſt was, to ſee a little Boy, who was too young to know the Reaſon, weeping only becauſe his Siſters did. The only one in the Room who ſeemed reſigned and comforted, was the dying Perſon. At my Approach to the Bed-ſide, ſhe told me, with a low broken Voice, This is kindly done--- Take Care of your Friend--- Don't go from him. She had before taken Leave of her Husband and Children, in a Manner proper for ſo ſolemn a Parting, and with a Gracefulneſs peculiar to a Woman of her Character. My Heart was torn in Pieces to ſee the Husband on one Side ſuppreſſing and keeping down the Swelling of his Grief, for fear of diſturbing her in her laſt Moments; and the Wife even at that Time concealing the Pains ſhe endured, for fear of encreaſing his Affliction. She kept her Eyes upon him for ſome Moments after ſhe grew ſpeechleſs, and ſoon after cloſed them for ever. In the Moment of her Departure, my Friend (who had thus far commanded himſelf) gave a deep Groan, and fell into a Swoon by her Bed-ſide. The Diſtraction of the Children, who thought they ſaw both their Parents expiring together, and now lying dead before them, would have melted the hardeſt Heart; but they ſoon perceived their Father recover, whom I helped to remove into another Room, with a Reſolution to accompany him till the firſt Pangs of his Affliction were abated. I knew Conſolation would now be impertinent; and therefore contented my ſelf to ſit by him, and condole with him in Silence. For I ſhall here uſe the Expreſſion of an ancient Author, who, in one of his Epiſtles relating the Virtues and Death of *Macrinus*'s Wife, ſays very juſtly; "I ſhall 'ſuſpend my Advice to this beſt of Friends, till he 'is made capable of receiving it by thoſe Three 'great Remedies, *(Neceſſitas ipſa, Dies longa, & Satietas Doloris)* the Neceſſity of Submiſſion, Length 'of Time, and Satiety of Grief.

In the mean time, I cannot but conſider with much Commiſeration the melancholy State of one who has had ſuch a Part of himſelf torn from him,

and

and which he miſſes in every Circumſtance of Life. His Condition is like that of one who has lately loſt his Right Arm, and is every Moment offering to help himſelf with it. He does not appear to himſelf the ſame Perſon in his Houſe, at his Table, in Company, or in Retirement; and loſes the Reliſh of all the Pleaſures and Diverſions that were before only entertaining to him by her Participation of them. The moſt agreeable Objects recall the Sorrow for her with whom he uſed to enjoy them. This additional Satisfaction, from the Taſt of Pleaſures in the Society of one we love, is admirably deſcrib'd in *Milton*, who repreſents *Eve*, tho' in Paradiſe it ſelf, no further pleaſed with the beautiful Objects around her, than as ſhe ſees them in Company with *Adam*, in that Paſſage ſo inexpreſſibly charming.

With Thee converſing, I forget all Time,
All Seaſons, and their Change; all pleaſe alike.
Sweet is the Breath of Morn, her Riſing Sweet
With Charms of earlieſt Birds; pleaſant the Sun,
When firſt on this delightful Land he ſpreads,
His Orient Beams, on Herb, Tree, Fruit and Flower,
Gliſt'ring with Dew; fragrant the fertile Earth
After ſoft Showers, and ſweet the coming on
Of grateful Evening mild; the ſilent Night,
With this her ſolemn Bird, and this fair Moon,
And theſe the Gems of Heaven, her Starry Train:
But neither Breath of Morn when ſhe aſcends,
With Charm of earlieſt Birds, nor Riſing Sun
In this delightful Land, nor Herb, Fruit, Flower,
Gliſt'ring with Dew, nor Fragrance after Showers,
Nor grateful Evening mild, nor ſilent Night,
With this her ſolemn Bird, nor Walk by Moon,
Or glittering Star-light, without Thee is ſweet.

It may further be obſerved, That tho' the Sweetneſs of theſe Verſes has ſomething in it of a Paſtoral, yet it excels the ordinary Kind, as much as the Scene of it is above an ordinary Field or Meadow. I might here, ſince I am accidentally led into this Subject, ſhow ſeveral Paſſages in *Milton* that have as excellent Turns of this Nature, as any of our *Engliſh* Poets whatſoever; but ſhall only mention that which follows, in which he deſcribes the Fallen Angels engaged in the intricate Diſputes of Predeſtination, Free-will, and Fore-Knowledge; and to humour the Perplexity, makes a Kind of Labyrinth in the very Words that deſcribe it.

Others apart ſat on a Hill retired,
In Thoughts more elevate, and reaſon'd high
Of Providence, Fore-knowledge, Will and Fate,
Fix'd Fate, Free-will, Fore-knowledge abſolute,
And found no End in wand'ring Mazes loſt.

*** Whereas I am informed, That there is a ſpurious and very incorrect Edition of theſe Papers printed in a ſmall Volume; Theſe are to give Notice, That there is in the Preſs, and will ſpeedily be publiſh'd, a very neat Edition, fitted for the Pocket, on extraordinary good Paper, a new Brevier Letter, like the Elzevir Editions, and adorned with ſeveral Cuts by the beſt Artiſts. To which is added, a Preface, Index, and many Notes, for the better Explanation of theſe Lucubrations. By the Author. Who has reviſed, amended, and made many Additions to the Whole.

N. B. Notice ſhall be given in this Paper, when I conclude my Firſt Volume.

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